

Gardening For Butterflies & Hummingbirds

by Patricia Sutton

1. **Work with what you have** ... native trees, shrubs, vines, & WEEDS are important / essential caterpillar food plants for butterflies (and moths). **Document evolution of your gardens** -- photo BEFORE, DURING, & AFTER, and over the years!
2. **SUN !!!!!** Butterflies are solar powered; a garden in a sunny spot is more likely to attract them.
3. Include as many **NATIVE PLANTS** as possible. Natives are GREAT and often grow with less care & fuss. If a good nectar plant likes your yard, consider it a gem ... not a problem plant. Stay away from fussy plants. If they need too much water and care, maybe they aren't worth it! **BEWARE OF CULTIVARS** – they've been created or selected for a specific characteristic often at the expense of nectar and may even have a changed leaf chemistry (so butterflies can no longer lay their eggs on them); too they may contaminate the native gene pool.
4. Plant as many “chocolate cakes” as possible & **plant them in MASSES**. **Mix annuals & perennials**. **Provide nectar spring through late fall**.
5. **Incorporate Caterpillar Food Plants:** native trees, shrubs, vines, grasses, weeds. And be sure to **offer other taste treats:** rotting fruit
6. **Offer diversity** (not a monoculture): annuals & perennials ... formal & informal ... offer some natural or weedy edges ... native trees, shrubs, vines ... wildflower meadow if space permits.
7. **Provide shelter** (and perches) in the way of shrub islands, living fences, etc.
8. **Do NOT use insecticides** – butterflies (and moths) are insects and will die ... and hummingbirds feed on insects and will be affected.
9. When you create a wildlife garden, you can't selectively choose who comes and who does not come. **Welcome all critters** ... bees, wasps, flies, spiders, aphids, “the works” and read about each new visitor (you'll learn that many are important pollinators / play key roles in the natural world).
10. **Show off your garden & its visitors** (butterflies, caterpillars, hummingbirds) to neighbors, friends, family, co-workers. Share some of your divided perennials with new wildlife gardeners, so they can start their own garden with gems – so your garden won't be the only oasis in a sea of green chem lawns.
11. **Visit other butterfly & hummingbird gardens for design and plant ideas**. I've offered “Tours of Private Wildlife Gardens” for the past 21 years (a/o 2012), initially through CMBO and since 2007 through NJ Audubon's Nature Center of Cape May. Learn of tours offered: www.njaudubon.org (NCCM)
12. **Long term planning**. **List your wants (plants & hardscaping** like paths, seating, arbor, etc). Create as time permits, i.e. tackle in stages (you don't have create it all at once). When laying out the garden consider a watering system (for new plantings & drought periods) and rain barrels.
13. **Maintenance – be sure to MULCH!** Grass clippings & salt hay break down & enrich garden. Root & bark mulch take years to break down & rob the soil of nutrients that plants need.
14. **To weed or not to weed?** Buy a good Wildflower Field Guide and Weed Book & be sure you're weeding something you truly do not want.
15. **Don't tidy up in the fall** – you'll be carrying off next year's butterflies & taking away important winter food (spent seed heads) & cover for birds. Maybe build a small wood pile just for butterflies to overwinter in.